

## Discovering Connections

Every youth deserves a strong social network to nurture, guide, and support their healthy development. Youth who have permanent connections with supportive adults and friends have better outcomes. It is our responsibility to assist youth in discovering and fostering these important relationships. This exercise offers a menu of questions to help youth in out-of-home placement identify and explore meaningful relationships in their lives.

**Purpose:** Identify potential family and other positive adult connections for youth in care.

### Guiding Principles and Best Practice

#### *Self-determination*

Youth decide which connections are recorded in this exercise.

#### *Trauma-informed*

The tool should be used to guide a thoughtful conversation, using good interviewing skills when the youth is physically safe. Watch for signs that indicate a pause, reflection, or even ending the conversation is needed.

#### *Strengths-based*

All people have strengths and, if named by youth, should be given the opportunity to fill a role in the youth's life. Families and friends can provide love and caring in a way that no formal helping system can.

### Using the Tool

- Pick a setting that promotes conversation and openness and matches the youth's interests. For example, take a walk outside, do an art project, etc.
- Be honest about the purpose of the questions and with whom the information will be shared. For example, *"I care about you and want you to have relationships with people that are important to you. I'd like us to work together to identify these people. I can't promise that we'll be able to reach every person or that they will be available, but it's definitely worth a try."*
- Not all questions need to be asked, or asked exactly as written. Strive to make this a conversation.
- Record as much information as possible about people the youth identifies and ensure that the youth is okay with these people being contacted.
- Give specific details about the next steps in the process. Do not over-promise but be sure the next steps are reached. i.e., *"We will do their best to connect with these people."*
- Be sure to thank the youth for their willingness to share.
- If youth are unable to name anyone, have a conversation about opportunities to build new relationships and connections while acknowledging the youth's resilience in the absence of these connections.

## **Discovery Questions**

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### **Activities and Events**

Tell me about how you spent holidays, birthdays, and special occasions. Who were the family members or friends you enjoyed being around or were kind to you?

Tell me about activities you've been involved in at school, church, or in your neighborhood. Who was there? Who did you connect with? Who made you feel important or listened to you?

### **Support**

Who are the three people in your life you've had the best relationship with?

Who could you call right now that would listen to you, give you advice or help you with a problem?

Who would you'd like to reach out to right now? Anyone you'd like to stay in touch with?

### **Safety**

Who looked out for you or cared about what happened to you or made you feel safe?

Who cared for you when your parents could not? Places you slept or ate when needed? Neighbors or teachers?

### **Belonging**

Who visits or calls you?

Who would you choose to live with? Relative? Friend? Former foster family?



## My Connections

My Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name	Relationship	Contact Information